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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8011
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0402
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0347
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1945
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0739
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0422
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0469
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0848

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000028

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-ISRAELI DEMONSTRATIONS REACH NEW LEVEL OF
VIOLENCE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

¶1. (SBU) Friday prayers in Nouakchott January 9 ended with people taking to the streets to protest continuing Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip. Accurate crowd numbers are hard to obtain -- some press reports placed the crowd at 10,000 or even 13,000 people. A more realistic number may be 2,000 people. In any event, the protest was large by Mauritanian standards. The demonstrators massed downtown, and then moved north in an attempt to reach the Israeli embassy, burning a police car along the way. The crowd chanted slogans calling for the expulsion of the "Zionist" ambassador and the severing of diplomatic relations between Israel and Mauritania. Several dozen protesters and police were injured, some seriously, when the police used tear-gas grenades and batons to keep the crowd at bay, who threw stones in response. Protesters were able to get within about three blocks of the Israeli embassy before the police, reinforced by the Gendarmerie, stopped them for good. By early evening, approximately 100 members of the Gendarmerie cordoned off a large portion of the downtown area. As of two days after the protest, stones continued to litter the main north-south thoroughfare of the city. At no time did protesters attempt to reach the U.S. Embassy.

¶2. (C) Though political parties called for the demonstration, which was tacitly sanctioned by the authorities, political leaders left the demonstration within an hour of its start after witnessing its degeneration from political protest to riot. Embassy LES' state that this was the most violent civil unrest since at least 1992, and FSNI could not recall the last time the Gendarmerie was called in to reinforce the police and quell civil unrest. Note: The Gendarmerie can only be called in at the request of the Wali (regional governor), and only after the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense has approved. End note. In the wake of the demonstration, the Wali of Nouakchott announced January 11 that all further Gaza-related protests are forbidden until further notice. The Minister of the Interior, who is ultimately in charge of the police, also made a statement accusing some political parties (without naming names) of taking advantage of the anti-Israeli demonstration to "stir up trouble and undermine public security." He hinted that formal charges may be forthcoming on certain political leaders, a move that is widely suspected to mean members of the moderate Islamist (and fierce anti-coup) Tawassoul party.

¶3. (C) Comment: Until now, the regime had been encouraging, or at least tacitly approving, protests against Israeli actions in Gaza, as long as protesters did not try to reach the Israeli embassy. After this latest violent demonstration, authorities appear to have realized that events can quickly move beyond their control. Although further protests are officially banned, it remains to be seen whether or not the authorities will be able to prevent them. End comment.

¶4. (C) Israeli Reaction: In conversations with Israeli Ambassador Arbel, Charge saw greater concern than previously voiced that General Aziz may succumb to growing pressure to cut relations. The Mauritanian's continue to tell the Israelis they will stick by the relationship but the Israeli's did note Mauritanian statements that the recall of their Ambassador is "just a first step." The Ambassador said Israel has no intention of recalling him. They will leave only if security is untenable or if Aziz cuts ties. The Israelis have been appreciative of the security provided to date as both effective and restrained. Meanwhile, President Abdallahi's Chief of Staff Mohamed Kaber Ould Hammoudi told Charge January 11 that, despite FNDD calls to the contrary, President Abdallahi has no intention to cut ties if/when he is back in power.
HANKINS